The Wayback Machine - https://web.archive.org/web/20010303190150/http://communitypresbyterian.com:80/21300.htm

Empowering Our Ministry: Christ as Model Spirit-filled Man

John 5:19-21; 14:12-14

Thomas Michael Smith
CPC 2/13/00

BACK TO MAIN SERMON PAGE

This morning I would like to conclude the arc of sermons on the way in which Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament as prophet, priest and king. In each area, Jesus completed His mission of fulfillment through the power of the Holy Spirit, and in each case, extended to us authority and power to function as prophets, priests, and kings, towards the advancement of the kingdom of God, which He brought in His person, and which exists within us, through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

I recognize that the Christian church has often focused on Jesus as the Son of God. This affirmation of the divinity of Jesus is absolutely correct and crucial. Jesus is the light of light, true God of true God, begotten (not made) of one substance with the Father, language from the Nicene Creed. Yet, orthodox Christianity, and the Reformation of which Presbyterianism is a part, also affirms the humanity of Jesus. In what seems at times a paradoxical, incomprehensible way, Jesus is fully God and fully human, like us in every way, except without sin.

In fact, I often tell people that Jesus had to have been able to sin. For the passage from Hebrews to make any sense at all, the passage in which Jesus is described as one who 'was in every respect tempted as we are, yet without sin,' for this passage to make sense, Jesus had to have been able to sin.

From this, we infer that the meaning of the word 'tempt' is pretty similar to the word 'test.' Perhaps 'tempt' has the meaning of seduction towards evil, and 'test' has the meaning of a neutral investigation, but the sense of Scripture is that the sin is not in the tempting, or in the testing, but in the accommodation. Sin lies in the doing of what is ungodly, not in the presence of the urge to be ungodly.

People of good will disagree, but I believe the passage from Philippians 2:6-7, affirms the notion that Jesus voluntarily chose not to draw upon his divine nature during his time on earth. The passage reads like this: "Though He was in the form of God, He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."

Thus, I don't believe Jesus' power and miracles came from His divine nature. People who do believe this see His mighty acts as signs that He is the Son of God, so that we are stirred to belief and adoration. The problem with this view, however, is that this view really implies a quantum difference between Jesus and us. If you believe that the powerful and mighty acts of Jesus happen because Jesus draws upon His divine nature (for the power to heal or affect nature or cast out demons), then this power clearly comes from a reality in which we can never share. But then, the words which Jesus speaks, read by the liturgist this morning, may seem strange, for they would appear to say that we will do the same works Jesus has done: "He who

believes in me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father" (John 14:12).

This verse, combined with many other passages where we see disciples actually *doing* the works Jesus did, convince me that the meaning of these words is that Jesus intended His disciples, in whatever age, to carry on the ministries of prophet, priest and king, through he power of the Holy Spirit, just as His ministry was empowered by the power of the Holy Spirit. So, when I see the phrase that we will do 'greater works,' I think this means we will be involved in more of the same, more love, more power, as the song we sing speaks about.

There are people of good will who believe that the 'greater works' Jesus mentions here are evangelistic efforts that reach a broader, wider, more extensive audience. Billy Graham reaches more people through modern communications and transportation methods than Jesus could have reached, so this is what Jesus meant by 'greater works.' I want to say that I understand this argument and, in fact, would have said the same thing a year ago. But then, as I've mentioned, something happened to me, or maybe within me, and I began to look again at the Scriptures, and see how not just Jesus, but the disciples of the early church, exercised potent ministries with authority and power, and I began to wonder why we can't do the same today.

I believe that from Jesus' own perspective and worldview, what He meant in the promise that we would do the works He did *is just want He says*. We will carry on the same power ministry that He did: preaching the kingdom of God with authority, guiding people to personal faith in Jesus, casting out demons, healing the sick, and setting people free from bondage to sin. We are to do what He did, and do it in the same way that He did, as weak human beings, totally lacking supernatural powers, radically dependent upon the Holy Spirit.

For Jesus was a fully human being who chose to radically follow His heavenly Father, and live without sin, and be Spirit-filled. He did what He did through the Holy Spirit upon Him, not through any intrinsic power of His own.

Before His baptism, He didn't manifest any supernatural powers. There are, of course, stories about how the boy Jesus made clay birds and breathed life into them, but these stories didn't make it into the New Testament because they have no basis in fact. The effect of the incarnation was that Jesus had the Holy Spirit dwelling within Him from birth, teaching Him the things of God as well as shaping and molding His character. But power for ministry was not given until the Spirit fell upon Him at His baptism.

In fact, Jesus Himself says He is totally dependent upon the Father, in the first reading from John this morning. Jesus says here that Jesus can do nothing in Himself. He is totally dependent upon discerning what the Father is doing, and in obedience Jesus follows along the path the Father lays out. This is the source of His miracles and power - an intimate prayer relationship with the Father. Jesus knew that the Father, through the Spirit, was moving to heal, so in power Jesus healed. Jesus knew that the Father, through the Spirit, was moving to raise the dead, so in boldness Jesus said, 'Lazarus, come out." And the Scripture says that the dead man did come out.

The various temptations proposed by Satan each contain the suggestion that Jesus act on His own, and not in accordance with what He sees the Father doing. Jesus is consistently careful to glory to the Father, and to point to the Father as the director of

the action in the play.

And I believe this is all relevant to us. We are called to enter the kingdom of God. In the kingdom we are called to carry on the three offices of Christ, prophet, priest and king. This isn't some impossible illusion of grandeur - it's a concrete possibility born out of the fact that Jesus has given us the same Holy Spirit who was upon Him.

For, you see, unlike the Old Testament prophets, Jesus received the Holy Spirit not only for Himself, but also for His people. John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, baptized people with a 'baptism of repentance.' The Father told John the Baptist (John 1:33) that there would come one on whom he would see the Spirit descend and remain, and this One is he who (will) baptize with the Holy Spirit. John baptized with water but Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. That is to say, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the act of Jesus transferring the Holy Spirit that was within and upon Him, to His body the church. And that's us.

This is why we too have spiritual authority and power, because that's the way Jesus wanted it to be, that's the way the Father designed it. The anointing of the Spirit upon Jesus was supposed to get extended to His body, so that His body, the church, can do the work of Jesus, can in fact bring about the kingdom of God, by preaching the gospel of salvation, exercising authority and power along the way. In Luke 9, there is the passage that says, "Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal." After this, Jesus sent out seventy and commanded them to heal the sick and to proclaim that the kingdom of God has come near. And in Luke 10 there is the report of these disciples returning to Jesus with great joy and excitement, having discovered that they really did have spiritual authority. They reported back to Jesus: "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" Well, duh!

Before ascending to the Father, Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission to continue His work. They (and we) are to be His witnesses, proclaiming the Gospel to the ends of the earth, like in Mexico and Brazil and in Burma, and Vacaville. And along with the giving of this mission comes the promise of the Holy Spirit through whom this mission would be accomplished (John 20:21-23; Luke 24:48-49; Acts 1:4-5, 8; 2:32-33).

After Jesus ascended to the Father, he was no longer, in the flesh, present with us. The Holy Spirit has come as another comforter to represent Jesus, and we may be baptized with the Holy Spirit so that we might continue the ministry of proclaiming the kingdom of God that Jesus began. None of us can become a sinless man or woman. But anyone who is a Christian can become filled with the Spirit and, I believe, exercise an extension of Jesus' offices of prophet, priest and king. Is it really possible that Jesus expects us to do what He did? You bet.

BACK TO MAIN SERMON PAGE

Copyright © 2000 Community Presbyterian Church, Vacaville, All rights reserved.

Castles INFORMATION NETWORK